

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
SUBJECT: GDR TRAVEL OF NYT CORRESPONDENT

1. NEW YORK TIMES BONN BUREAU CHIEF JOHN VINOCUR HAS JUST COMPLETED SEVEN-DAY STAY IN GDR IN COMPANY OF NYT MAGAZINE EDITOR AND MEMBER OF EDITORIAL BOARD ED KLEIN AND WIFE AND DESCRIBED ARRANGEMENTS AND TOTAL TIME IN GDR AS "DISASTER". VINOCUR HAD HAD PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION WITH PAO FOR STORY RECOMMENDATIONS AND HAD BEEN TOLD AT TIME THAT RESPONSIBLE GDR BODY, HAUS FUER JOURNALISTISCHE DIENSTLEISTUNGEN (HJD), WOULD BE SCHEDULING ORGAN. VINOCUR HAD SUBMITTED VISA APPLICATION THROUGH MFA TO HJD IN APRIL WITH EXTENSIVE LIST OF REQUESTED APPOINTMENTS AND PLACES TO VISIT. APPROVAL DID NOT COME UNTIL LATE JUNE, BUT DESPITE TWO INQUIRIES ON STATUS OF REQUESTS WITHOUT ANY NOTICE OF APPOINTMENTS OR ITINERARY.

2. VINOCUR WAS EXPLOSIVE IN DESCRIBING TREATMENT AFFORDED
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HIM AND NYT EDITOR BY HJD AND PROMISED RETALIATION. HE SAID HIS ESCORT-INTERPRETER (1200 DM FOR WEEK) SUGGESTED TO HIM ONE EVENING THAT RECENT EVENTS IN MOSCOW WITH NYT CORRESPONDENT CRAIG WHITNEY, VINOCUR'S PREDECESSOR IN BONN, PLAYED ROLE IN GDR PERFORMANCE. IN ANY CASE, VINOCUR SAID HE VIEWED THIS, HIS FIRST TRIP TO THE GDR, AS A CATASTROPHE RESULTING FROM MINIMUM EFFORTS ON HIS

BEHALF BY GDR.

3. VINOCUR WAS DISTURBED BY WHAT HE CALLED A "DECEPTIVE APPROACH" TO HIS REQUESTS, SOME OF WHICH INCLUDED AN INTERVIEW WITH MINISTER OF EDUCATION MARGOT HONECKER, WIFE OF SED CHAIRMAN; VISIT TO SCHWEDT TO SEE THE DRUZHBA PIPELINE; MEETINGS IN ROSTOCK WITH SHIPBUILDING OFFICIALS IN VIEW OF GDR PROMINENCE IN THIS FIELD; MEETINGS WITH YOUNG WORKERS IN ROSTOCK; MEETINGS WITH SCHOOL-CHILDREN; MEETINGS WITH MUSIC STUDENTS IN LEIPZIG. OUTSIDE OF LEIPZIG, NONE OF THESE TOOK PLACE, VINOCUR SAID, AND INSTEAD HE AND KLEIN - WHO HAD COME ALONG IN THE EXPECTATION OF INTERVIEWING MRS. HONECKER - WERE TAKEN TO A LOW-RANKING MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OFFICIAL WHO TOLD THEM NOTHING OF VALUE; INSTEAD OF YOUNG WORKERS IN ROSTOCK, A GROUP OF FDJ IN THEIR LATE TWENTIES SPOUTED THE OFFICIAL PARTY LINE; INSTEAD OF SHIPBUILDING OFFICIALS, THE HARBORMASTER WAS OFFERED; WHEN KLEIN ASKED TO SEE MINISTER OF DEFENSE HOFFMANN IN PLACE OF MRS. HONECKER, NO REPLY EVER CAME. A VISIT TO NORTH SEA RESORTS WAS MADE BUT ONLY AFTER VINOCUR PROTESTED AT THE LACK OF COOPERATION. ON HIS LAST DAY, KLEIN HAVING DEPARTED, VINOCUR WENT TO LEIPZIG AND HAD A GOOD DAY WITH A GROUP OF MUSIC STUDENTS, WHICH HE TERMED THE HIGH-POINT OF HIS GDR VISIT, BUT FAR FROM BALANCING OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED. AN INTERVIEW WITH THE FOREIGN TRADE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINISTRY'S SCHMIED WAS FRUITFUL.

4. WHAT VINOCUR FOUND MOST IRRITATING WAS INSUFFICIENT FACILITATIVE ASSISTANCE, A SEEMING INDIFFERENCE TO HIS NEEDS AS A JOURNALIST, AND THE INADEQUACY OF HIS ESCORT-INTERPRETER, WHO OFTEN DIDN'T KNOW HIS WAY AROUND THE CITIES VISITED, ESPECIALLY LEIPZIG. (VINOCUR IS NOT NAIVE CONCERNING OTHER ROLES THE ESCORT MAY HAVE PERFORMED.) HE SAID THAT HIS AND KLEIN'S IMPRESSION OF THE GDR REACTION TO THEIR VISIT WAS THAT THE IMPORTANCE FIRST OF THE NEW YORK TIMES, AND SECOND, OF THE NEED FOR HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS ON WHICH TO BASE RESPONSIBLE STORIES SEEMED LOST ON THE HJD AND WHOMEVER ELSE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE APPOINTMENTS. BOTH VINOCUR AND KLEIN DEPARTED ANGRY AND OFFENDED AT GDR NEGLECT AND/OR INDIFFERENCE.

5. COMMENT: VINOCUR'S EXPERIENCE IS YET ANOTHER INSTANCE OF THE GDR'S APPARENT INEPTITUDE IN COMING TO GRIPS WITH MAJOR PROBLEM OF ITS IMAGE ABROAD, ESPECIALLY IN THE U.S. MEDIA. WHILE OFFICIALS DEPLORE WHAT THEY TERM THE "NEGATIVE APPROACH OF THE U.S. MEDIA TOWARD THE GDR," THEIR

INABILITY TO COPE WITH VISITING JOURNALISTS FROM MAJOR
AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS AND TO PROVIDE EVEN THE FACADE OF AN
ARRANGED PROGRAM CONTINUES TO BE INEXPLICABLE. EVEN TAKING
INTO ACCOUNT GDR POLICY OF NON-ACCREDITATION OF FRG AND
WEST BERLIN BASED CORRESPONDENTS, REASON WOULD DICTATE
THAT SHABBY TREATMENT OF THE NYT BONN BUREAU CHIEF COULD
NOT PRODUCE ANYTHING BUT NEGATIVE REPORTING. IN FACT, ON
DEPARTURE VINOCUR THREATENED TO DO EXACTLY THAT, FRUSTRATED
AFTER BRIEFING HIMSELF SO THOROUGHLY, PARTICULARLY WITH
KEY EMBASSY OFFICERS, ON CONDITIONS IN THE GDR. VINOCUR'S
CASE AS WELL AS THAT OF THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE'S HOWARD TYNER

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(SEE BERLIN'S A-6) ARE WORTH RECALLING WHEN GDR OFFICIALS
COMPLAIN TO US IN WASHINGTON AND BERLIN ABOUT OCCASIONAL
U.S. PRESS STORIES ON THE GDR. MEANWHILE, THE GDR PRESS
CONTINUES ITS DAILY DISTORTED REPRESENTATION OF THE
UNITED STATES. ALEXANDER

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